Russ Nicholls

COYPU MARSH **by Alan Savory**

The SHOOTING TIMES
and Country Magazine

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

THERE has been some criticism of late of the National Parks Commission for not having done more to advertise and popularise the National Parks. Mr. J. D. U. Ward has written a letter to *The Times* contesting this criticism, in which he has made some excellent points that country and shooting men will be interested to know.

He says that until the behaviour of the British public improves (in particular about litter, the making of fires by accident or intent, damage to trees and theft of wild plants, treatment of gates and crops and the use of portable radio sets), the National Parks Commission and the individual park authorities do well to concentrate on the conservationist side of their duties, including their "Country Code" publicity, and to go slow on any popularising activities. Anyone who is seriously interested in such matters, he writes, knows that the parks exist, nor is there any secret about their boundaries, even though they may not be declared on public notice boards.

All those who have the true interest of rural Britain at heart will be in agreement with what Mr. Ward has said—particularly about litter, treatment of gates and crops and the use of portable radio sets. Those who must have radio sets should not come to the country at all—their best place is surely a *crowded* beach!

Mr. Ward then asks whether the words "National Park" are not a little misleading when used for the making of comparisons with American National Parks! In America, he points out, the parks are older established, vastly larger, and less likely—because of a smaller "density of visitation"—to be seriously damaged by the most destructive of the world's animals. But since American conditions have been mentioned, it may be noted (though this does not refer especially to National Parks) that in many places where shooting and fishing are free or open, game birds and fish are now extremely scarce or non-existent. This, he points out, is the direct result of too much popularity. By analogy, some of the attractions of our own National Parks could be reduced or destroyed if there were some kind of a mob movement to savour their joys and amenities.

Mr. Ward ends up as follows: "I suggest that, on balance, the National Parks Commission is in danger of going too fast rather than too slow in its work. National Parks are a novelty in this country and we shall watch how the idea is realised, gradually, rather than risk doing damage which could not be undone."

A great deal is heard today about the needs of better and wider education. What surely is wanted and what seems to be so often entirely lost sight of in this controversial jungle, is the crying need of education on *how to live*! In the present welter of post-war existence there is a big and growing danger that the whole *art of living* is being lost. It is certainly in dire danger. It may well be that a full and proper appreciation of the uses and aims of the National Parks will eventually, but before it is too late, help to educate certain sections of the public in the art of living. It is not a question of more text books (there are too many already) but of an understanding of wild life, field natural history and country ways. Such an appreciation of those things can lead to a better conception of what goes on around us every day and to which many of us seem utterly blind.

* * *

COMMON LANDS

In appointing a Royal Commission to undertake a review of the overall position of the law affecting common land in England and Wales the present Government shows a willingness to tackle a problem which its predecessors over at least a hundred years have avoided like a minefield. Psychologists might with advantage examine the Englishman's attitude towards common lands, for all who have any direct connection with such lands have a deep inherited belief in their rights. The same men have allowed most of their individual rights to be destroyed or whittled down in the course of two wars without a word of complaint—but touch a common and the pressure gauges burst. It is a good thing that this should have been so, for without the ever ready opposition to infringement the two million odd square miles of common might by now have been consumed by undeserving interests. It is time the whole matter was examined, and a Royal Commission ensures justice to all. The Commission has a big task before it. Every piece of common land must be considered separately on its merits and the conflicting needs of housing, amenities, nature preservation, playing fields, industry, etc., balanced in relation to the common in question. The commission can only recommend. It will be a long time before its report can be submitted and not until then is the Government likely to take any definite legal action.

SALMON RESEARCH

For some time it has been known that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has leased the Stedcombe Manor Estate fisheries on the River Axe, which reaches the English Channel at Axmouth. On July 27 the senior inspector of fisheries to the Ministry, Mr. F. T. K. Pentelow, explained to the Eastern Advisory Committee of the Devon River Board the salmon researches which the Ministry hopes to carry out during the next ten years. He said that 20 or 30 years ago it was decided that restocking was the only thing that would keep salmon rivers going, but this had never been proved. The Axe had been chosen since it was possible to rent the fishery and since it was a river which offered no technical difficulties to trapping every salmon on its way upstream. Traps for this purpose would be set above Axe Bridge and the salmon would be released as soon as they were checked. A similar but less effective check will be kept on the smolts going downstream. Among the questions it it hoped to answer are the relations existing between the salmon stock and the catch; the effect of a dry summer on the fish; the variation in runs of fish; and the number of smolts that resulted from a certain number of spawning salmon and the proportion of these smolts that returned to the river as salmon.

FATAL SHOOTING ACCIDENT

A very sad fatality occurred last week at a farm at Thurlby, Lincolnshire, in which the four-year-old daughter of the farmer, Mr. William Sharpe was shot and died soon after. It appears that Mr. Sharpe had recently borrowed a gun to shoot the pigeon which were raiding his crops. His eleven-year-old stepson, Brian, picked up the gun from its place in the kitchen and ran to take it to his father in an outhouse. As he passed across the yard the gun went off accidentally and his little stepsister Cynthia fell to the ground dying. Some of the pellets of the single-barrel 12-bore struck the outhouse, narrowly missing thirty-eight-year-old Mr. Sharpe. He dashed out and while his wife cradled Cynthia in her arms he stumbled off across the fields to a telephone. But Cynthia died in her mother's arms as an ambulance raced her to a hospital seventeen miles away. Mr. Sharpe is reported to have said: "I've never been one for guns and I've never had one on the farm before. But this year the pigeon have been so bad taking the seeds and crops, that I borrowed one from my brother."

BEES AND THE SUN

When days are long and sunny and when a plenitude of flowering plants provides a generous flow of honey a worker bee will work itself to death in from three to five weeks. This means that during the warm spell many millions of bees have lived and died in this country without ever realising that England was a land in which rain could fall and on which the sun did not always shine by day. The result of such unusual weather is strong stocks of bees and abnormal quantities of honey; and the bee-keeper is likely this year to make up what he lost in 1954. That is in terms of honey, but not even in this summer is there a hope of replacing the countless colonies of bees that were lost in the dampness of last year.

WITHOUT COMMENT

A badger ate the tail of an Ayrshire cow at Ffynonoer Farm, Llechryd, Cardiganshire, yesterday.—*Daily Mail*.

Duck, Butterflies And Magpies . . .

by Tower-Bird

A READER writes to tell me that he was most interested in my article "The Menace With a Gun" (issue July 1), which condemned the all-the-year-round shore shooting, including duck, which goes on in many coastal areas round our shores. My correspondent knows the areas of my own operations—Chichester and Langston Harbours—and agrees that such shooting is most prevalent there during Sunday mornings. He makes the wise suggestion that, instead of (or as well as?) laying information, tactfully-worded letters might be written by responsible individuals or by the local wildfowlers' association to the Chief Constables of West Sussex and Hampshire. And I think the same might well apply to any maritime counties where there is much out-of-season shooting by those who do not recognise close seasons.

My correspondent also points out the fact that he believes no posters were issued by the County Councils drawing attention to the alteration of the close season. "Probably," he adds, "the new Wild Birds Protection Act does not provide for publication of its provisions on police stations, local council offices and the like, leave alone on roads leading to the foreshore where the people concerned would be most likely to see them." He quotes instances of honest shooting men, including landowners, who would never put a foot wrong, but who seemed to be quite unaware of the change in the close season for wildfowl.

Well do I know how right he is in this latter respect, for, outside those circles (wildfowling clubs, etc.) it has been the exception to find a shooting man who is aware of the new opening date for duck shooting, and any amount of them have not even heard of the new Act. In these days of wide publicity, one would have thought that the powers-that-be might have done more than they have in this respect. True, notices have appeared here and there (and tucked away in odd corners and in small type) where county councils have taken advantage of their rights to approach the Home Secretary and have, with his permission, made certain Orders effecting Sunday shooting, etc. But it seems to me that, for publicity purposes, more use might have been made of the popular Press and even of the B.B.C. Moreover, police stations should have been made better informed, at least about the more important provisions of the new Act. However, there it is . . . and undoubtedly very many duck have already been shot this month, and more will be shot before the opening date of September 1, and those of us who uphold the law will be the losers. For I know that some of the duck with my label attached to them are now but bones and feathers in the dust-bin.

Invasion by Butterflies

There have been paragraphs in the Press about the "invasion" of white butterflies which a southerly wind has blown over the sea in vast clouds. They have, according to report, almost whitewashed the Isle of Wight and adjoining counties on the mainland, and even held up traffic in Dorsetshire. I do not know the actual truth about this invasion, or the reason for it, but I do know that for every white butterfly we see each year there are hundreds this August. We are told that children are making as much as £2 a week or more, having been offered a penny for so many caught. This I can quite believe. But children are wild young things, and they waste their energy chasing the butterflies here and there. If they only stood quietly in some cabbage patch for an hour or two, their money-boxes would far more quickly fill. I dread to think of what many gardens will look like when the caterpillars hatch.

In the little bit of walled-in garden outside the window beside which I am writing this article, a buddleia bush stands like a large fern. I cut it back this year so that only a few bare stalks were left. Now, it is in very full flower, and attended upon by a score of butterflies—red admirals, peacocks, etc., and a hundred bumble-bees—but a swirl of whites is continually on and about it, while I can hardly discern the brilliant carpet of mixed zinnias, petunias, nasturtiums, blue nemesia, carnations, asters, antirrhinums, montbretia, stocks, mesembryanthemum, and lobelia which is formed by this small patch because of the hundreds of dancing, swirling white butterflies. Incidentally, giving credit where credit is undoubtedly due, I must confess that, apart from planting a number of clumps of various coloured michaelmas daisies and chrysanthemums, this small garden is entirely due to the industry and plotting of my wife, although nature has added a background of various pleasant little flowering creepers which grow from crevasses in the low wall. My own industry is confined to clod-hopping on the allotments.

A small Sussex lake—a daytime sanctuary for duck—with downs in the background.

Morning Flight

Every morning at first light now I watch the duck flighting from the marshes, flying northwards to the big open water lakes and other daytime lay-bys far inland. At present, this flighting is irregular, both as regards time and numbers. Later, I shall see hundreds of mallard spread out across the sky as they leave both barley stubbles on the down-tops and the marshes. These mornings only small parties follow each other northwards—"parties" of from a score to single birds. Some come over my cottage no more than fifty feet up, even when there is no wind. Others, having risen far back, or from the downs, are well out of gunshot. It is an easy matter to identify those duck which live far off from those home-bred ones of the local marshes, as the former fly with strong, purposeful flight, obviously making for a distant objective, while the home birds merely fly round in wide circles.

Give Me the Duck!

Presently it will be no rare sight to see parties of from a score to a couple of hundred and more mallard high up in the sky during the late afternoon. It is then too early for them to settle on the barley stubbles on the hill-tops, and I imagine that they have been shot at, or otherwise disturbed, on their home waters. Like bombers collecting at some given place and altitude in preparation to forming up for a raid on Europe, they circle round, waiting until the men have left the fields, and the coast is clear for them to come down and feed. You can have your great goose flocks and their wild music; I, myself, get far more kick out of seeing these many mallard, with later great companies of wigeon up in my home skies. The geese have always thrilled me, and always must, for I have spent dawns and dusks in Lincolnshire and elsewhere watching their battalions. But there is something about duck which stirs me to the core. To me, geese coming in to decoys on land (birds dead easy to shoot) are not a patch on those smaller birds dropping in to well-placed decoys on water.

At the recent W.A.G.B.I. executive committee meeting at Peterborough, I discussed with a number of members, living widely-separated in parts of the country, the apparantly noticeable decrease in magpies during and since the nesting season. For a time, I had thought this decrease to be a local affair, but, from time to time, I asked various people from different counties if they had noticed it. And, so far, each one of them is certain that there are less magpies in his neighbourhood. Mark you, there are still "enough and to spare," but I wonder what has caused this decrease. If, for some reason, or reasons, it were due to local migrations, then I should have expected by now to hit upon someone who could speak in terms of obvious increase.

A number of people have offered the theory that vast numbers of magpies have died through eating rabbits deceased from myxomatosis. I have no proof at all, however, that this disease in any way effect either birds or beasts which consume the rabbits that have died from it. I know dogs which picked up dead rabbits and ate them day after day. I have never found a dead crow or magpie which has died from consuming rabbit flesh (except the doctored variety!), and, though I read a letter in our contemporary, *The Gamekeeper*, not long ago, in which the writer used a split-open myxomatosis rabbit as bait in his crow, or rook cage-trap, and the only decoy bird therein died as a result, and, when he went to a neighbour who worked a similar trap for a decoy bird, exactly the same thing had occurred there, I do not believe that vermin birds suffer from eating diseased rabbits.

Dogs eat these wretched creatures, but do foxes? I have no first-hand evidence that they do, yet I do not see why they should not. And, while magpies are fewer, I much regret to say that the same thing does not apply to carrion crows. They have increased in my district, and everyone I meet, from counties apart, has a similar woeful story to relate.

Rust, on the snow-sprinkled marsh, holds a coypu at bay.

COYPU MARSH

by Alan Savory

THERE is nothing very remarkable about this marsh. There are many like it here and there in out-of-the-way places in this England of ours. It is just a few acres of sodden fen that takes the flood water from a nearby river and so acts as a safety-valve in times of melting snows, high tides, and high winds that pile the water up in the river, so that the water pouring off the uplands far inland cannot get away.

The wonderful thing about this little marsh is that a few pairs of South American swamp beavers, known as coypu, escaped from a fur farm, have eaten down the vegetation and turned the marsh into a wild life paradise. They have done nothing that a man could not do with a scythe! That is, if a man with a scythe would work all day and every day in three feet of mud and water, cutting channels and pools in the rushes and carting the litter away, and by so doing would make a series of pools and drains and mudflats that would pattern the marsh so that it was opened to the skies, like the far reaching floods that attracted the countless fowl in the old-time fens.

I have always known this marsh. In the very early days when the country roads were gravelled and the stinking, rattling forerunners of the motor car came banging and puffing along the lanes in clouds of dust, and one's desire was to throw stones and run away, the marsh was cut every year, and the marsh hay was sold up in London for the horses that pulled the omnibuses. I could see the hay carts from my nursery window and the men loading them and leading the horses along the marsh-wall.

Black With Wildfowl

In the winter time the marsh was flooded and at times black with wildfowl. There were very few alder trees, and tall willows did not grow all along the river as they do now, to obstruct the view. The "great old river," that ebbed and flowed with the tremendous pulsations of the wild sea tides, wound like a ribbon of silver through the green marshlands of youth, heron-haunted and full of mystery.

On summer days, when the air was heavy with the scent of meadow-sweet, and the purple spikes of loosestrife sent shimmering reflections across the drainage dykes, and I had escaped from petticoat restrictions, there were breathless adventures on this marsh. There were swallowtail butterflies and broods of wild duck; sudden glimpses of darting pike in the clear water; the hot smell of marsh hay and nettles and rotting vegetation; and that oily smell of eels that haunts the old fenlands. More often than not, I was collected by a bearded, leather-thigh-booted marshman and marched off home listening to an East Anglian monologue which never varied and always began with: "Yer agoin ter get yer backside tanned—du yer know thet! Yer might hev pitched into ther deek. We might hev been acromin for yer now, an' then what would yer mother say!"

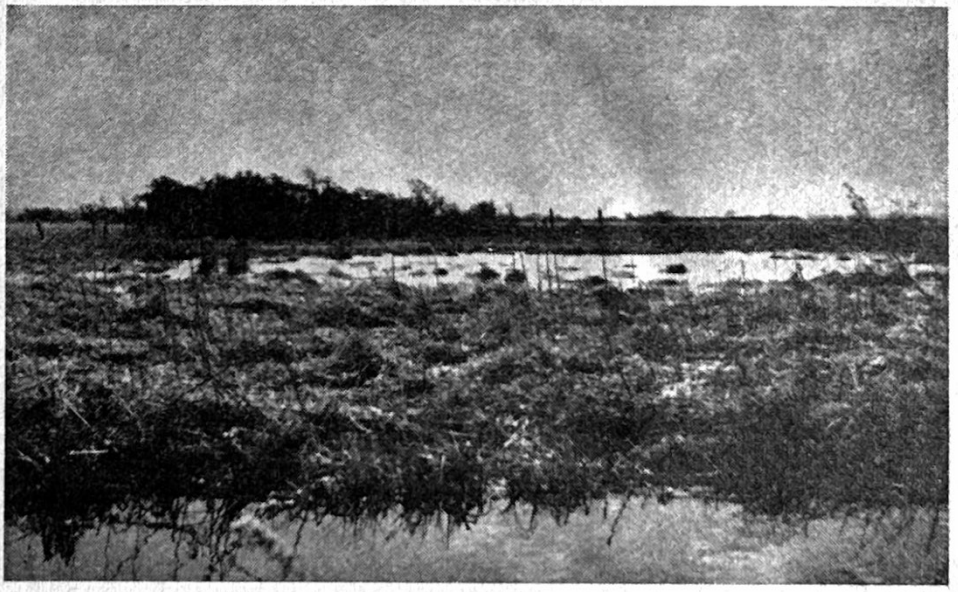
There were sluices in the river banks that kept the marsh drained in those fodder-cutting days, and an old water mill that was the home of a pair of kestrels. The dykes were kept clean and it was only exceptional summer rains that put water on the marsh. In the winter the marsh was always wet when the tides were high in the river, but providing that the water did not stay on the grass too long it "sweetened the feed," the marshmen said.

Then came the great summer flood of 1912. That was the end of the marsh as a paying proposition. The mill went down; the sluices broke; the dykes became filled with flood rack. When at last the river left the marsh and flowed once more between its ancient banks, the fodder trade had gone and the rank sedge that replaced the sweet grass marsh hay was not worth cutting. All through the desperate days of the first World War the marsh just grew up. Wildfowl ceased to go there. They could not settle on the grown-up fen, and there was no open water for them in winter. Only in times of melting snows did the duck return, and then they swarmed there and fed all day on the meadowsweet seeds, docks, and sorrel that battled for growing space on the choked-up marsh walls. But as soon as the water had gone the duck went, and the marsh was lonely and drab until spring painted in the wild flowers, and warblers sang the whole day through.

Duck Must Have Water

The old men of the marshes said that wildfowl were finished, they "didn't come no more." Of course, they did not come to the marsh. There was nothing for them to come for. Duck must have water. There was plenty of water on the marsh, but it was under five feet of sedge, and great banks of willow-herb; under nettles that stung like wasps, and waves of creamy meadowsweet that in its season rolled with the wind of summer like breaking waves on a great, green, shallow sea.

But vegetation does not stay static. First one plant predominates, then another, and as the rotting plants change the nature of the soil, so does the species of the plants. During the middle 1920s the feathery-crested thatching reeds had spread over the marsh and flourished with their feet in five inches of permanent water. The willow-herb and nettles were banished to the higher land of the old marsh-wall alongside the river. There were acres of saw-toothed, cutting sedge and bright green plumed reed-grass, and in the old grown up dykes the golden flags of the water iris waved. The wild carrot, the food plant of the swallow-tail butterfly grew in profusion. When the tides in the river were high, the surface of the marsh lifted, and there were holes where a seeping current flowed. The marsh was almost back to the old time fen, but still too



Hard work with a scythe, and a profitable flighting pool results.

thick for fowl, other than water-rails and water-hens to bother with.

In 1934, I hired the sporting rights on this marsh. It was quite a small place really, barely seventy acres, most of which was impossible to walk through. Any rugger player who had grown fat through summer sloth could sweat off a pound or so in a morning by just walking through the marsh. It was one vast tangle of reeds, wild sweet-pea, cutting sedge, yellow loosestrife, purple loosestrife, and wild iris. On the marsh-walls were great beds of nettles and willow-herb, and here and there clumps of agrimony. Often one would come upon large patches of the giant white convolvulus binding the willow-herb together, and so making an impenetrable mat that was quite impossible to force one's way through.

Cutting a path alongside the main dyke was a major operation, and one only to be attempted on windy days so that the flies were held somewhat at bay, for there is a fly that lives in these marshes that can hurt worse than a wasp sting and is three times more aggressive, and will actually feed on one if not swatted. It is a green-eyed brute with a large yellow and brown body—a kind of horse-fly. It will send cattle mad, and chase them into dykes. There is another one that is grey and has spotted eyes, which, although smaller, is almost as bad ; this is the pepper fly and it will bite right through flannel trousers. These flies and a host of mosquitoes and gnats make the marsh a nightmare in the summertime on hot, still days, and when one starts to perspire through struggling through the reeds, they are on you like wolves. All the glamour of the summertime marshes disappears when the insects start getting active.

But to stand at the foot of the upland meadows in the first wave of meadowsweet and watch the pollen blowing in a yellow cloud from countless flowers ; look out across the far reaching marshes and alder trees cloudy in the mist of distance, and the hazy yellow and green chequer-board pattern of the ripening harvest fields on the highlands far across the valley ; perhaps to see a marsh harrier slowly beating back and forth, is to stand far back in the pages of history in the old fenland of the Saxon kings, when the red sword of the Viking invader was an annual summertime hazard.

That first season's shooting on the marsh with my old dog, Drake, did not start until October, and by then the marsh was a golden sea of reeds. There were wild pheasants and a few duck at flight time. The pheasants were hard to get, and had to be chased and chivvied until they flew. It was hard going, but we got a few old cocks, and every one was earned the hard way. A mallard or a teal in the bag was something to be proud of. We went fighting a good deal, old Drake and I, and we nearly always saw duck, but mostly going over on whispering pinions far up in the evening sky. On quiet evenings one can hear flying duck a very long way off. First Drake would turn his head listening, then I would hear them. Then over they would go, possibly two hundred yards up ; we would watch them out of sight, trying to will them to turn and come in lower within shot.

When the Frosts Came

We did a little better when the frosts came, but only to the extent of two or three teal, shot as they jumped out of the unfrozen waters of the main dyke. But the marsh was in one's blood. There were bitterns there which flapped slowly over the reeds like great tawny moths. There were tremendous sunsets that burnt up the western sky like a blacksmith's forge, turning all the reeds into red spears and lances, and then faded to purple and the darkness of night. There were days after rain when huge clouds like snow-white cauliflowers drifted slowly and majestically across the blue sky. And winter days of storm and cold when the woods of the valley slopes were hidden behind a grey pall of rain. It was wild shooting and one worked hard for very little.

So the years between the Wars rolled by. I was getting plenty of shooting in one way and another, but not much off the marsh except in times of snow, when the picture changed overnight, and for a glorious few days one lived in a world of wildfowl seeking open water and duck off the ice-free river taking a short cut across the white wastes of the marsh.

But all this time the marsh was changing, and where once cattle had grazed and hay had been cut, there was a foot of water and the giant reed-mace lifted their dark, brown poker heads above the sedge. Meanwhile the world rocked in the capitals of Europe as the years of the so-called peaceful '30s drove remorselessly on. Old Drake died and his son, Sam, helped with the wild pheasants on the marsh, followed by his son, the ragamuffin Michael.

Rust standing in the flight pool.

Then we began to hear teal whistling at flight time out on the darkening marsh. Teal calling where no teal should be.

Grey Goose Feathers

Michael and I battled our way to the top of the marsh one windy morning and found a swamp of reed-mace and iris with the water showing round their roots. There was a small pool at one part of the marsh which swayed like a spring mattress. There were grey goose feathers on the pool, and that night Michael and I struggled there for flight. We stayed until it was pitch dark, but no geese came. There was a bad hour getting off the marsh, which had become a floating nightmare of reed-clumps and rotten sedge. Everything looked the same, and I completely lost my bearing. Eventually we reached the river wall, but not before I had been in over my waist several times. Then we heard bean geese calling like ghostly spirits. The marsh had become the olden time sinister fen, and the fowl were coming back.

One day, after a night of storm, a friend with a fur farm wherein he bred coypu rang up to say that he had lost about thirty of them owing to a tree floating down the swollen stream which went through his waterpens, bashing down the railings and letting the animals escape. They had just gone into the blue, but if they got down the river into my part of the valley we knew they would have plenty to eat. Reed-mace and meadowsweet are their favourite food. The only trouble was that as I had a coypu farm, too, I should get the blame for it, but it did not seem very important in the light of the events that were happening across the channel.

A Nostalgic Dream

Then came the war, and coypu, wildfowl, and wild marshland became a nostalgic dream. But all the time that I was away I paid the rent of the marsh, even though I knew perfectly well that every poacher who had dodged the Services would shoot on it. At last the day came when I saw the marsh once more, but it had changed out of all recognition. The coypu had got there and were well established in spite of poachers. Furthermore, they had eaten out the reed-mace and meadowsweet, and had turned the marsh into the most delightful duck swamp, with little pools leading into big pools of tennis-lawn size all over it, and clumps of reeds and rushes sticking up here and there.

It was the perfect teal shot, but a terrible place in times of high tides, when the surface bubbled and heaved like a boiling pudding. It was as if the river ran under the marsh on the old estuary bed, when there was a lot of water in the river the whole marsh floated. One could walk on it with care, but there were one or two places that were horrifying, and there seemed to be nothing at all under the marsh crust once the roots of the rushes had been eaten away. But it was perfect for duck, and the coypu had done a good job, and they kept on doing it and keeping the open water from growing up. The yellow iris became the dominant plant, and the tall thatching-reeds grew in a wide swathe from the river to the edge of the swamp. Green sand-pipers and redshank came to the low tide mud, and there were many snipe. Picking up the duck one shot was very difficult, but could be done if one was careful and did not try magnum shots, but took the ones that came close in and sent the dog right away. Rust, the yellow labrador, successor to Michael, goes immediately he sees a bird down, which is the only way on this marsh, although frowned upon by those who do not understand duck shooting in such places. This marsh is not safe to flight on at night unless one leaves off shooting while it is still light enough to get off without too much difficulty. One has also got to be able to shoot while standing on one leg, or with feet stuck fast in stinking mud.

A friend and myself had one or two wonderful August mornings there, the duck fairly roaring up off the water as we forced our way through the hundred yards or so or nine-feet reeds to the water's edge. Then after most of the fowl had left the marsh in the semi-darkness they started drifting back as the dawn came pinkly in the eastern sky. They came in ones and twos mostly, and we shot twenty. It seemed incredible after all those years of nothing but an odd teal or so. But it was not a good way to shoot the marsh and the fowl soon became shy and kept far out in the open where there was no cover, and one was up to one's knees in mud. The tides, too, even normal ones, would in places blow up the mud like a blister, so that one would suddenly break through with one foot. It made shooting too hazardous, especially if one shot much alone.

Now came the great plan—to keep the marsh as a sanctuary and have a morning flight there once or twice a season, but let the fowl use it, as they apparently wanted to, to rest on during the hours of daylight. And within a quarter of a mile make a small flight pond for evening shooting.

(Continued on page 550, col. 2)

Gun Gossip

by North Country

A LONG letter about gun manufacture and allied matters has reached me from Mr. John Baker, of Horsforth, and I would like to refer to parts of it which I feel are of general interest. Readers will know that Mr. Baker is an experienced shooting man who often carries out tests and who, from time to time, is kind enough to write to me about shooting matters. I may say I always appreciate a letter from his pen.

Mr. Baker was interested in what he describes as "your very apt remarks in the July 8 issue of *The Shooting Times*, to the effect that 'great skill is involved in making guns of superb balance and that whatever happens this craftsmanship must never be lost'." He says that this aspect of gun building has been exercising his mind for some time. The best guns, he says, have a peculiar fascination for some people and command market prices far in excess of comparative commodities. He adds, "I myself have become a victim by buying a post-war best quality 12-bore D.B. side-lock gun from a famous maker, paying a price (plus purchase tax) for the pleasure of owning such a weapon quite out of proportion to its utility value and contrary to my native north country nature of wanting value for money. Whilst this attitude persists the best quality guns will still have a limited market regardless of the cost of production; in spite of this, craftsmen are the product of an economic condition and the gunsmith's art reached its zenith during a period when there was a plentiful supply of labour at low wage rates, coupled with patronage from the country gentlemen of the Victorian era who had sufficient money to satisfy the fashion of attending shooting parties with only the best equipment."

He goes on to say that for the reasons stated above it may now be necessary to modify designs in order to get equivalent quality from a machine-built gun; in fact the box lock is already the established British design for bulk production (that it may not be built to the same degree of quality is because it is built down to price).

Mr. Baker also expresses this opinion: "No one disputes the quality of the best British made guns, but that the side lock gun seems to us the acme of perfection is because nothing better has been produced, it would become a museum piece in a decade once a real inprovement is invented as opposed to merely fashionable improvements such as over-and-unders."

Mr. Baker then says that we tend to overlook the fact that the side lock gun was developed before the introduction of accurate machine tools and is essentially a product that had to be suitable for manufacture by hand labour using the very limited range of materials then available. It does not seem to him to be in the interests of good craftsmanship to continue to produce guns by hand labour when progress has given us precision machine tools which can be made to produce work to a degree of accuracy and finish that cannot be even approached by the very best hand labour. Of course, he says, gun makers will be assisting production by the use of machines and better materials, but present day production methods cannot be employed to full effect in a gun which is designed for manufacture by hand.

It should not be taken for granted that because I quote extensively from Mr. Baker's letter I am necessarily in agreement with all he writes. But I do feel that all he writes is of great interest. And now here is another paragraph which I think should be quoted: "Take a part such as the action which is designed so that it can be slotted out from a solid forging: with the development of precision casting a whole field of new design is opened up, this piece can now be made much more intricate and at the same time the cost reduced by using precision castings, moreover if alloy steels are used, which are too tough to be worked by hand a stronger and lighter action can be built. Two barrels were necessary because when they were introduced automatic loading was unknown, but why perpetuate them today? I know that those who have handled American and Belgian pump guns will throw up their hands and say, 'what about balance? My answer is that I have an old flint lock single barrel gun (built before 1831 with 32in. barrel and a lock by Nock) which balances and swings better than any two barrel gun and I am sure that balance will eventually be obtained from an automatic loading two or three shotgun."

My space, I find, is running out, but more of this next week.

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Wildfowling Clubs

Secretary's Notes

These and my next notes will deal with The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland's Executive Committee Meeting held at Peterborough on August 13. Thirty-five members attended, including Mr. E. L. Parish in the chair. Discussions covered a wide range of subjects, some of which will be dealt with here.

Probably first in general importance is the news that a meeting has been arranged between the Council of the Wildfowl Trust and the W.A.G.B.I. Executive Committee with the object of discussing (but not voting on) common problems. Apart from certain points at issue from the past that should not bedevil the future, both organisations have many objects in common. It is to be sincerely hoped that this first meeting may lead to a co-operation that will steadily improve relations between the two bodies mainly interested in wildfowl.

The shooting of wildfowl on Sundays has now become a matter of great moment to many wildfowling clubs, particularly those whose members are chiefly men working fixed hours. As there has been a lot of illogical argument and hazy thought, a short review of the background, of the intention of the new Act and of the present outlook, may not be out of place.

Sunday Shooting

Before the passing of the new Act the decision on allowing or forbidding Sunday shooting of wildfowl was made by local authorities. Their rulings varied from area to area round the coast with the results that there was no uniformity, and that it was difficult for a stranger (who wanted a few days' fowling) to know the local rule, and equally difficult for him to find out—even in some cases from the police.

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One object of the new Act was to standardise this jumbled state of affairs: the Act therefore laid down that Sunday shooting (of wildfowl), was permissible except where local authorities recommended otherwise. We might, therefore, assume that the intention of the new Act was to let Sunday shooting have a trial run. In the event many local authorities have recommended otherwise, and it looks as if Sunday shooting will be forbidden in many areas, and the confusion as bad as before.

An argument against shooting wildfowl on Sundays is that the Sabbath peace would be disturbed. A good argument, provided that all shooting were stopped. In fact, many councils recommend that the shooting of wildfowl be stopped, but that of vermin allowed—with the result that pigeon may be shot near a church all day, but wildfowl on far away marshes may not. Illogical to say the least of it!

Only Chance of Morning Flight

Considering the man working fixed hours, during the winter months his only chance of doing a morning flight is on Sundays. Remove that opportunity, and he is left with only a Saturday evening flight per week. Add the facts that the rabbit has been practically eliminated from the English countryside and that pigeon narcotics are being experimented with, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the outlook for the countryman with a gun is poor.

After all, anyone who does not want to shoot wildfowl on Sundays is not under any compulsion to do so. The majority of those who can shoot during the week do not shoot on Sundays. Equity and a sense of "fair dos" demand that the man who cannot shoot during the week should not be deprived of half his winter's sport.

A point for consideration by wildfowler-naturalists (and the majority of fowlers are naturalists) is "who is going to enforce the new Regulations?" The police, we are told, will not prosecute: who will? We may reluctantly come to the conclusion that in areas where offences are numerous the local wildfowling associations may have to harden their hearts, take the advice of the police, and themselves take action. If offences are unchecked it is the wildfowling interests that suffer.

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Manx Game Preservation Society

Restocking with Game and Jungle Fowl

At the annual meeting of the Manx Game Preservation Society, the report on the past year's activities showed progress is being made in accordance with the aims of the Society and it is hoped to extend its membership and work. Mr. J. T. Chrystal presided and Mr. Jas. Corteen, one of the joint hon. secretaries, submitted the annual report, *extracts* from which follow.

The year just ended is the first complete year of the Society since its inception; interest has been maintained, and in fact increased; particularly by the general public and considerable progress has been made in various directions. The membership of the society has decreased, the paid-up members being 45; this to a large extent is due to members not being notified that subscriptions were due; and also to fixing the year end on June 30, this only being 8½ months from formation of the Society.

Your committee have met on seven occasions, and the meetings have been well attended. Early in the year our treasurer, Mr. W. Flinn, had to resign due to being transferred to Merseyside; Mr. W. C. Jones kindly consented to become treasurer and has been most efficient. Mr. J. Goldsmith and Mr. A. Prosser were co-opted as members of the committee.

Our first venture, to have a stand at the Royal Manx Agricultural Show at Milntown was a great success, in spite of the inclement weather; the stand at which pheasant chicks and young poults were in pens, and guns, old and modern, on show, created considerable interest among the public and was very favourably commented on by the Press. Your committee have considered having a similar stand at this year's Royal Manx Show at the Nunnery.

Our president, Mr. Yates, extended an invitation to members to shoot grouse on his moor, Dreenkiel, on two occasions and this gesture was greatly appreciated by the shooting members. A success-

(Continued on page 551, col. 2)

Give the Youngsters a Break!

by Bill Powell

OH dear, oh dear! The boy who wants to shoot is indeed up against it. He is, by all accounts, hemmed in and harrassed by legislation, nature reserves, protectionists, safety-first precautionists and anti-bloodsportsmen—to say nothing of the prohibitive cost of weapons and cartridges.

Heavens forbid! Let us all come down to earth and face realities. It *could* be that things are not what they were when we old 'uns were boys. But I can distinctly remember my father saying exactly the same thing to me, and I have no shadow of doubt that my grandfather moaned in like manner to his son, and my great-grandfather in turn before him.

There have always been good 'uns and bad 'uns in every sphere of activity, and, human nature being what it is, there always will be. And the shooting field is no exception. Bad behaviour by the few can never be altogether eliminated, but it can be greatly diminished if the old hands will *at all times* give a lead and set a good example. Remonstrate at once whenever the written or unwritten laws are transgressed, and encourage the young to take similar action.

It is possible that the Bird Protection Acts go a little too far, and in so doing defeat their own objects. There is a grave risk that an Act that makes a criminal of a little boy if he takes a plover's egg this week instead of the week before, will be treated in the same manner as, say, the 20 m.p.h. speed limit for heavy lorries, and with the equally universal disregard of the 30-mile limit.

Everyone knows it is wrong to poach, or to take long shots, or to shoot a protected bird, or to shoot out of season. *Everyone* knows it is dangerous to point even an unloaded gun at anyone, or to take a loaded gun into a house or a car. Is there any reader who can honestly say that he does not know of some—maybe minor—poaching affray, or who has not at some period witnessed some criminally dangerous act with a gun, committed by persons who not only should, but *do* know better? And, let us be honest, have these misdemeanours been solely confined to the young shooter?

The shooting man in general and the wildfowler in particular has also to contend with the ever-increasing band of pseudo-ornithologists. Every wildfowler is *ipso facto* a bird-watcher, but unfortunately the converse is by no means the case. The growing hysteria and sentimental raptures of many "nature lovers" are somewhat alarming and show tendencies of getting out of hand. They should appreciate that the possession of a pair of field-glasses and perhaps a nattily embroidered armlet does not automatically transform them into scientific ornithological experts. On the contrary, a discussion and bird-identification that I overheard recently between a couple thus equipped—wild geese nor wild horses will drag from me what was embroidered on the arm-bands!—would have been laughable if it had not been so pathetic. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. And today there are a great number who profess to be, and call themselves ornithologists, who have little if any knowledge of their hobby. Such men and women are dangerous, for they are often as bigotted as they are illogical.

The Preacher

Not long ago I was dining with a rabid anti-blood fanatic. I let him rant on at me, but over our coffee pointed out that the salmon and roast pheasant that he had just enjoyed indicated that he was a better preacher than practitioner. But of course that was "different."!

The recent Wild Birds Protection Act has been the subject of much acrimonious discussion between the various parties interested. The wildfowler on the one hand, and the protectionists and anti-bloodsport people on the other. There is, as there should be, an overlap between the wildfowler and the protectionist. The genuine wildfowler, who is not solely concerned with the size of his bag, has a deep and passionate love for the birds he kills. To many such a contradictory state of affairs probably seems incredible, but it is none the less true. Such a fowler will be amongst the first to favour the protection of any species that is becoming rare, and it is only when cranks endeavour to interfere unnecessarily with his immemorial rights that he rises in his wrath and speaks his mind.

A change of clothes and off home with his first goose.

Quite Shocking Reading

The discussions have brought to light an interesting point. Many famous wildfowlers of the past, whose names were once household words in wildfowling circles, have appeared to have come out on the side of the protectionists. Many of them have written most excellent books recording accounts of their skill and prowess, which by today's standards make rather shocking reading. And the young wildfowler is apt to feel, with some justice, that it is these very people who in their youth had their sport without restriction, that are now trying to hem him in with new and unnecessary rules and regulations designed to spoil his sport.

Now why should this be? I have endeavoured to analyse my own feelings in the matter. I am a professional wildfowler, or perhaps I should say "wildfowler's guide." I am no longer young, and in my time have shot a great number of geese. I know of several who have actually shot, and even more who claim to have shot, greater numbers, and I say here and now that I am not one whit proud of my achievement. At the same time, I shall continue to wildfowl as long as I have health and strength to do so, but I can honestly say that I do not care if I never shoot another goose.

You may wonder what point there is in carrying on in the cold and discomfort so often involved. The answer is quite simple. It is the actual *chase* that appeals. It is thrilling to get to the right spot at the right moment, and to watch them fly over within shot. Once you have learned how to shoot geese, the actual shot is a complete anti-climax. I know, unless dead off form, that I can hit them, but to bring one down no longer gives me the thrill or pleasure that it once did.

Conditions Never Hopeless

One of the many charms of wildfowling is that conditions are never hopeless. True, certain types of weather and states of tide greatly increase the chances. But whatever the weather, there is always the "glorious uncertainty," and the unexpected happens. It is difficult conditions that give me the greatest thrill. To work out a flight line successfully in adverse circumstances, or to conclude a difficult stalk seems really worth while. At my time of life the actual trophy is not important to my self-esteem, but I can remember that it was vitally necessary twenty or more years ago. A wonderful feeling it was to handle and weigh, to admire and display the result of so much effort!

Therefore, I do not join with those of my generation who wish to stop others from shooting wildfowl, provided the birds are shot on flight in a sporting manner. Many of those who have come to me have shot their first goose under my guidance, and their pleasure at their success has only been equalled by my own.

And so I appeal to those "poachers-turned-gamekeepers" who have had their fill of killing geese, to spare a thought for the younger generation of sportsmen, and to let them pursue their fowl with the minimum of restriction and interference. The benefit of their experience will be gladly accepted, to be passed on in turn, no doubt. Wildfowl are well named, and only require the protection generally accepted as necessary to game birds to thrive and give the youngsters the exciting sport that is their heritage.

ROUGH SHOOT DIARY

by Weekender

It was one of those baking hot days when pigeon shooting is often more of a penalty than a sport, however necessary it may be. There was not a breath of wind, and the sun scorched down out of a merciless azure sky. The pigeon were flocking into a field of peas that had been ploughed in, without being harvested. The pods had dried and the peas in them had popped out, much to the satisfaction of the pigeon. This they showed by coming into that field all day in a seemingly never-ending stream.

There were four of us there, sitting in hides made out of pea-haulms left over from last year's harvest (probably the easiest matrial from which to make hides), and further over there were two men from the County Pest Control at County Hall. In some of the clumps of trees we hung bird-scaring ropes, and a smallholder further over still had a carbide-and-water "cannon" in operation. Consequently, the pigeon were kept moving all day, but with sufficient rests between each "blow-up" to make them want to stay in our area.

The Pest Control section started shooting at about 6 o'clock, so by the time we got there at 8.30, the birds had got wise to them and were feeding happily on our side of the fence. Most of the woodies present were "lambs," probably experiencing human opposition for the first time. Once we started shooting, however, they copied the example of the old 'uns, and before long they, too, were jinking about all over the place, though they never became so wily, as our average of cartridges to kills (two to one) showed.

Evening fishing for sea-trout at the mouth of the Bervie.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

AT the moment of writing, the heat wave continues, although some light cloud and a fresh breeze indicate a break, which is, however, unlikely to be permanent yet if the calculations of our weather men are accurate. Nevertheless, a good soaking would help the countryside to regain its wonted greenness. For several weeks the fellside intakes have been gradually assuming the dun hue of the Sahara desert, except where they are shielded by the sun-resisting bracken. Even the lower meadows have not escaped a scorching here and there. The thin turf over the rocky outcrops is completely brown; and corn growing on gravelly soil (the residue of bygone bursts in the beck banks) is prematurely golden. Fortunately, there was sufficient rainfall in the early summer to bring on the grass crop; so the hay in this district was cut, cured, and housed in record time.

But if the farmers are now praying for rain, the holiday-makers evidently are not. They are enjoying a treat that comes all too seldom in our capricious climate. Down at the beckside almost straight below my own abode is an encampment of nine tents; and this nomadic community is only one of the many in this valley. Everywhere people are taking advantage of the fine weather to get back to nature, which includes the shedding of as much clothing as possible. Never have I seen so many tanned bodies. And if some of those semi-naked campers of the male sex arrayed themselves in feathered head-dresses, they could pass easily for Red Indian braves. It would be ungallant, however (and rash!) to compare the other sex with squaws.

Where Our Dreams Take Us

During a hot spell of this sort those of us who are obliged to remain at home think longingly of scenes which are apparently far removed from the fever and the fret of everyday existence. If we are ordinary non-sporting citizens, we have dreams of a blue ocean with wavelets lapping a golden strand; of the midday haze shimmering on the crags of romantic Highland glens; of the sunset fading peacefully over the Western Isles; of the freshness of the Lake District at sunrise, and of other places in this superlative island.

And if we have sporting inclinations, we still wish to reach an earthly paradise of the conventional kind, but with the added attraction of shooting and fishing. So our dreams take us to the mountains, moors, streams, lakes, and seas where those pleasures can be practised. In office, factory, warehouse, and other dreary prisons of a commercial age our minds will wander off into the wider spaces where the zephyrs blow unhindered by barriers of brick and mortar. We will lean on an imaginary butt, and watch the coveys wheel on a purple skyline; or we will cast our lines contemplatively into broad riverline pools and broader estuaries at eventide. Then we will return with a jolt to the drabness of our alleged civilisation. But the luckier ones will make their dreams become reality before the fine weather is past.

Drawbacks of the Heat Wave

One must admit, however, that a prolonged heat wave has its drawbacks both from the field sportsman's and from the gamekeeper's points of view. On the moor, for instance, the grouse are often reluctant to rise when the afternoon sun is sizzling on the heather; and if they do rise once during a long drive, they are unlikely to get up a second time, unless the drivers practically tread on them. Young birds are particularly prone to become lethargic in hot weather in the early part of the season, and their non-appearance over the butts has made moor owners and lessees voice their disappointment at the scarcity of grouse where no real scarcity existed. I myself have listened to those complaints, which became gasps of astonishment a few weeks later when the weather was cooler and the birds stronger.

Walking-up grouse can also be something of a trial for men and dogs during a spell of scorching heat. The dogs go about their work in a disinterested fashion with tongues hanging out and flanks throbbing. Their main idea in these conditions is to find some burn, syke or swamp where they can submerge themselves in cool luxury. Only the very staunch ones continue to search out game for their sweating masters, who press on over the dusty heather until they too throw off their loads of grouse, cartridges, and guns beside a crystal brook, and gulp down pints of water, tempered with a wee drop of whisky to protect their stomachs from a sudden chill. That is, if they can find a crystal brook; for it is unhappily true that many peaty moors have peaty brooks, from which knowledgeable sportsmen are unwilling to drink. Often I have plodded over the North Riding moors with the local keepers in a torrid atmosphere sweating profusely, but we rigidly ignored the tempting coffee-coloured rills.

Grouse in Marketable Condition

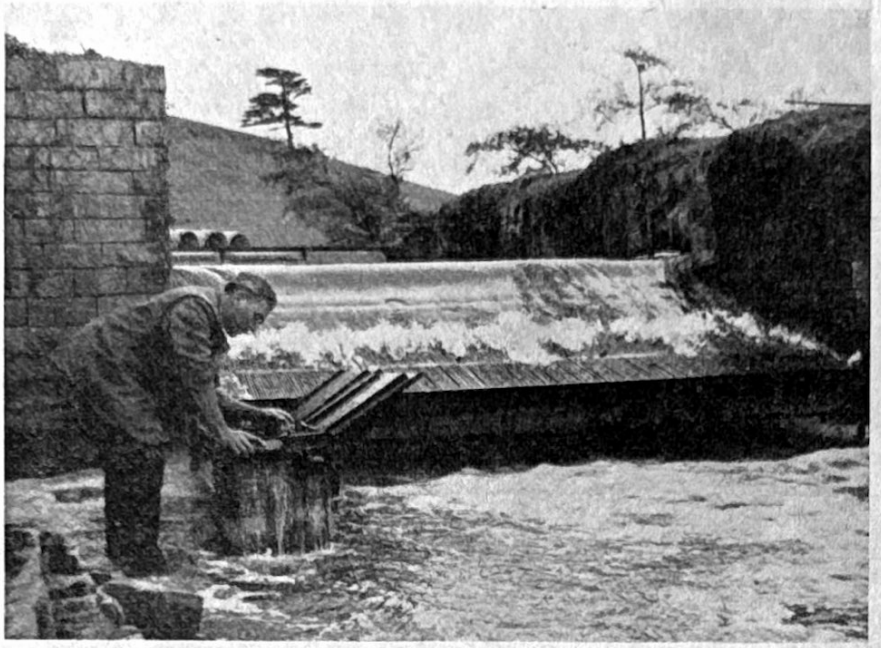
The question of keeping grouse in marketable condition is also ever present when the temperature is high, and here again young birds are mainly the unconscious offenders. Their softer bodies are much more liable to go bad if they are thrown haphazardly into a gamebag or pannier than those of their firmer parents, particularly when they are sodden with blood. Therefore, it is a wise plan to motor a big bag off to the larder as soon as possible, or to cache small lots behind some shady wall or heap of stones until the shooting party is ready to leave the moor, providing that the caches are not likely to be visited by prowling dogs. I have also seen grouse laid out on the shady side of an open luncheon shelter; but whatever method is adopted to keep grouse fresh during shooting operations in excessive heat, someone is bound to have a certain amount of worry over their well-being. Even if they are so well cared for that they stiffen properly, they are always liable to be attacked by blowflies. These pests can be foiled in the larder, of course, by an electric fan which can be got to travel through an arc of about 100 degrees. Our moorland grouse larder was fitted with a portable draught-producer of this sort.

Shooters and fishermen of the low country may also discover that one can have too much of a good thing when they survey the cracked snipe bogs, the glassy lakes, the shrunken rivers, and the muddy meres. In vain they look for fowl and fish in their customary haunts. The duck have departed in search of wetter surroundings; the salmon lie far away in the lower reaches gasping for oxygen, if they have not already succumbed to disease; and the more sedentary trout have sought the deeper pools, from which they refuse to be lured by the most tempting baits.

Sometimes they, too, cannot get enough oxygen from the tepid, semi-stagnant water, so they turn over on their backs to show that death has ended their purgatory. On two occasions that I remember our local beck dried up completely, except for isolated pools that gave temporary refuge to all the fish in the neighbourhood. Eventually those refuges became deadly traps, and the doomed trout were removed by human beings and gulls.

During a time of great drought the danger to piscine life from even the slightest degree of pollution is increased enormously. An inconclusive case of this sort was quoted in the *Weekly Scotsman* of July 20. According to the report, several hundred trout weighing from a quarter of a pound to a couple of pounds were found dead in the River Leader between Earlston and Lauder. The inspector and chemist to the Tweed Pollution Board said that the fish showed no external symptoms of disease, and that the most likely cause was poisoning or oxygen deficiency. This minor tragedy affected a seven-mile stretch of river. It is just possible that those fish would have survived if the water had been up to normal level and down to normal temperature, even with a fair degree of pollution.

However, we cannot have perfection in anything for long; and if we do get an extended approximation, we soon tire of it. But before we voice our little vexations at the drawbacks inseparable from practical experience of a marvellous summer, let us thing of the advantages. And let us also think of the storms, floods, rotting crops, and drowned game of last year.



The fish trap just above the weir at Bathpool.

Wanted: More Salmon

by P. Tryon

EVERY angler who handles a salmon rod would probably agree that we could do with more salmon in our rivers. More waters with a run of salmon, more fish for the rods, more fish for the nets, more salmon to eat at lower prices, less bickering among rival claimants for limited stocks. 'Tis, as Hamlet said, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

The question of salmon stocking is entirely different from stocking with trout, or fresh-water fish. There, you can put in fry, yearlings, or takeable fish on the reasonable assumption that those which escape an untimely death will be there to provide your money's worth of sport in due season. But before a salmon becomes a sporting fish it must go to sea, feed and grow, and it has been estimated that only 4 per cent of migrating smolts return as adult fish. Taking into account losses up to the smolt stage, the numbers, and therefore cost, of young salmon needed to make a very small increase among returning fish is extremely high, though it is sometimes done.

This is why other methods of improving salmon stocks—reduction of netting, adjustment of close seasons and so on, are naturally very much in the public mind at the moment. There is, however, more to it than allowing breeding stocks into the rivers. Some streams have only a limited amount of spawning grounds; in others, obstructions prevent the fish from reaching existing suitable spawning beds at the headwaters, and some valuable work is now being done to eliminate this last trouble.

Planting Fertilised Eggs

In the face of all these problems one special method of salmon stocking is of vital interest to anglers and fishery owners. This is, put very briefly, stocking not with fry, or larger fish but at the earliest possible stage—planting fertilized eggs.

The economic advantages are clear. A hatchery is not essential, though some authorities advocate keeping the ova in a hatchery till the "eyed" stage. There is no artificial feeding, and planting is simplified, since it is very much easier to transport ova across country to headwaters than young fish.

So much for the question of labour and L.s.d. in general; but what of the other advantages of this method? It has been shown by investigation that natural spawning, once believed to be a very inefficient business, does in fact produce a very high percentage of fertile eggs. So if you catch up the ripe fish, strip them, and return the eggs to the same river, how will there be any marked improvement in the stock?

The answer lies in the protection given to the planted eggs. However many fertile eggs a pair of salmon produce naturally, they are subject to tremendous losses through predators, floods, silt, before, as well as after, they become fry. By ensuring that the eggs are (a) placed in the most suitable spawning beds high up in the feeder streams which only a limited number of parent fish would have reached under normal conditions, and (b) putting them into protected redds, a very much larger number will emerge as fry.

Before the war a few experiments were made to test this theory in practice, among them some on the Hampshire Avon which showed, in 1936, that the planted ova produced about 3¼ times as many fry as a comparable natural redd. Since the war, more work has been done in various parts of the world, and one of our own leading authorities, Mr. Cecil Myers, who has studied stocking methods for many years, is strongly in favour of the protected redd principle.

America to the Fore

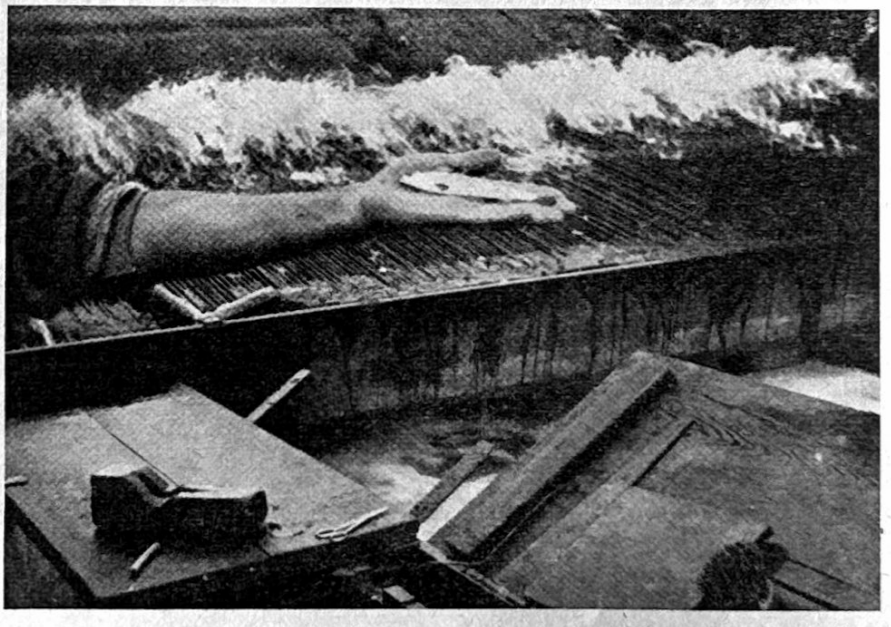
America is always well to the fore where scientific investigations are concerned, and Americans, too, have been busy with this question. A recent issue of the *Progressive Fish-Culturist* gave a detailed account of experiments with Chinook salmon in "simulated stream conditions" at Cook, Washington in 1952-3, and although these are a different strain from our own, the results are extremely interesting and probably equally applicable here.

The experiments were carried out with eyed ova approximately 70 days old in both plastic screen bags (12 mesh to the inch), and boxes with a wooden frame and plastic screen sides. Different depths were used for the artificial redds with 3, 6, 12 and 18in. of gravel over the eggs, and the size of the boxes varied so that in each case the sides came above the gravel surface. Two sizes of gravel and three different speeds of water flow were used.

As far as the layman is concerned, the two facts of special interest are (1) that the average hatch of eggs in the whole set of experiments was 96 per cent, which shows that human intervention does not damage an appreciable number of eggs in the planting; (2) the importance of the size of gravel. Here, only 13 per cent of the eggs in the "small" gravel (1in. and less in diameter) emerged as fry, while in the "large" (1in.-3in.) grade the survival rate was 87 per cent. This was, of course, with Chinook salmon; different strains and stream conditions no doubt affect the required size of gravel, but it is obvious that this is a vital factor.

Finally, a particularly interesting experiment is being carried out over here by the Somerset River Board in the river Tone. Eyed ova were

(Continued on page 550, col. 3)



A salmon smolt immediately after being tagged.

The Young Shot

Be Prepared

by Petrel

THIS time last year I seem to remember, and the game book entry lends substance to memory, I was sitting back smacking my lips and gently massaging a "rotunda" replete with home-bred duck and home-grown peas. This year, with the duck granted respite until next Thursday, and the peas, thanks to the drought, a shrivelled, torn up memory of the past, I am massaging less contentedly, but with much more urgency in an effort to aid the free passage of a less digestible ring dove, and between recurrent Persian compliments, licking my lips in anticipation of better things to come.

To say that I am frustrated is putting it mildly, especially after last night when with no attempt at concealment, I sat at dusk on the edge of an algae crusted lake and watched the duck flight in undisturbed to sit and quack and preen and upend in the shallows no more than fifteen yards away. It was hard to explain to the hound who sat still and silent by my side, but ever casting covetous glances at the dibbling fowl, and then looking back over his shoulder as if to ask "What are we waiting for?" that Parliament has decreed a new opening date, though not so difficult, I wager, as it is to impress this change of dates, and the reason for it, upon some mutton heads who can read and write and yet still remain ignorant of the new laws. But at least I can truthfully say that this season I am ready to greet the new, delayed oponing day in full preparedness, and being a bit of a *cunctator* at the best of times, the enforced extra fortnight of idleness has given me time to look to and put right the failings of other years.

Personally, I am fit and fancied. My summer cold which spoiled the opening day last year is over, my boots fit and my wellingtons and waders let no leaks. There is nothing wrong with the gun, as the annual two-day check up has proved, and fifty brand new cartridges (expectations, you see, are modest) await transference to belt and pockets. The greatest problem this year has been to get a new dog fit for operations in a short time, but morning and evening exercise, water-work and a tonic plus special care in feeding have worked wonders in so short a time. As a team we are "rarin" and ready to go, and I don't think we have forgotten anything. There are thousands of others similarly prepared and only waiting for next Thursday's dawn, but I wonder if all of them have taken the trouble to ensure maximum results from this most important date on the calendar.

Left Undone

I watched a neighbour last week checking his shooting kit. "There we are; all in order," he proudly exclaimed, as he finished his task. "A morning at the clays, and I'm all ready."

"What's the plan for Thursday?" I asked, "and how do things look this year?" For a moment he seemed a little hard of hearing. At last, "To tell you the truth," he exclaimed, "I haven't the faintest idea. Haven't been over there for ages. Was leaving it till next week."

If he had a keeper I might have excused him—slightly, but by no means absolutely, for the unfortunate tendency nowadays is for too much to be left to the keeper. But he has not, and I wonder just how much unnecessary time he will waste on that initial outing. And what his guests will think of his lack of planning.

Thanks to the pioneers of progressive farming, like "Turnip" Townsend and others, the modern farm today wears a new look every year as a result of a systemised rotation of crops. And on this rotation the sport of the rough shooter greatly depends, not only with regard to the number of wild birds which he may expect to find on the land, but also regarding the way in which he should arrange his shoot for best results. Cultural changes are always occurring, and it is up to him to judge the season's potentiality and programme accordingly. Take, for example, the small one hundred acre holding which comprises a major part of my several scattered shooting grounds.

This time last year they were off to a good start.

Not So Bad

Last year the two largest fields on the place were down to wheat and barley, and thanks to the wasteful combine, a great deal of rich feeding was left in the wake of the harvest, which provided a great draw for pheasants and partridges. This year, with the farm changing hands and the accent on dairying, there has been no corn grown at all, so that if I had not looked further than my nose I might have viewed this season's game prospects with some pessimism. On the contrary, however, after surveying the changed scene I am more than optimistic, for one of the fields is now under kale and mangolds—splendid holding cover—and the other, although lying fallow, has produced a luxuriant growth of weeds which in turn should provide ample food for the few partridges in the neighbourhood. There is, too, one other advantage in the absence of corn and stubbles.

This year every field for miles around seems to have been sown with corn—and every other one, incidentally, has grown barley—and thanks to the abnormally early harvest, nearly all that corn is cut and carted. In a very short while now, all the stubble will have come under the plough, and I foresee my small acreage offering an oasis of food and shelter in the midst of a brown and barren desert.

As long as the drought continues, so will it increase the chances of a duck or two on the tiny hill-top pond, for here again, although the level is low, there is still some water which is more than can be said for most of the other ponds in the area. Last year the best chance of an early duck was on the barley stubble and in the low ground meadows, but current conditions rule these out as commonsense and reconnaissance have shown. The water meadows will come into their own with the late autumn rains and the programme is adjusted accordingly. It will be a waste of time to pay them a visit for at least two months unless we have a monsoon.

Pigeon Prospects

Pigeon, too, present a very different problem, and there will be no worthwhile decoying until the New Year when they should turn their attention to what is left of the kale. Attention now is concentrated on those that flight to the wheat stooks and stubble across the boundary, and a new hide has long been built hard by a line of trees on their flight line. In the wood at the end of this belt of trees I notice that the oaks bear a better than average crop of acorns, which promises well for pheasants to say nothing of more pigeon later on.

It may be because we have had to wait longer to make a start this year, but I for one am looking forward to the new season with more eager anticipation than ever. More likely, I think, it is because every season seems, at the start anyway, more full of promise than the previous one. At all events, however the season turns out, I am satisfied that the time spent in thought, preparation, inspection and planning will help me to get the best out of it. I am prepared for anything and everything. Are you?

On looking back over what I have written, I notice that there is one important aspect of this business which I have omitted.

While a man may pay every attention to his shoot during the close season, observing crop changes, trapping, shooting vermin and so on, he may, in his preoccupation and quite unintentionally, forget his landlord, and see nothing of him from one season to the next.

In the same way the landlord, who more often than not will be a busy farmer, will see nothing of his tenant, though his is not the obligation, after all, so long as the rent cheque arrives on the appointed date.

On third thoughts, that is not quite right. Of course the landlord, having accepted the rent, has certain obligations to his tenant as laid down in their agreement, but quite often he forgets to carry them out to the full—being so busy—and the rough shooter who is presumably not so busy and is, anyway, beholden to his landlord's magnanimity must see to it that he knows about everything which may affect his lease.

Make a point then, of delivering your rent by hand and discussing with your landlord any changes which he intends to make which may in turn affect your shooting.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

A WILDFOWLING CLUB FOR NORTH CHESHIRE

Sir,—As a result of "Tower-Bird's" recent article "Another Call to Arms" and the correspondence with reference to those wildfowlers who do not live within striking distance of a wildfowling centre, it is proposed to form a North Cheshire Wildfowlers' Club. An inaugural meeting will be held at the Wagon and Horses Hotel, Stalybridge (on the Mottram Road immediately before crossing the Stalybridge/Mottram boundary) on September 5 at 8 p.m. Mr. S. M. Bjornsen of 67 Yarburgh Street, Manchester 16, is acting hon. secretary, and it is sincerely hoped that all shooting men in the area will attend.

The club is intended to provide for those who work and live in the city, far away from any wildfowling, a meeting place where they can discuss shooting "over a pint" with fellow wildfowlers.

Mr. W. Chapple, Chief Pests Officer for Cheshire, will attend the meeting and has promised to give his support in finding members of the new club shooting, if possible all the year round, in the area.

Any further details will be willingly given either by Mr. Bjornsen or the writer.

J. B. Brough,
48 Greenleas Road,
Wallasey, Cheshire.

READERS WRITE

Sir,—Having read "Tower-Bird's" article under the above title, and following on a little episode which took place this afternoon, I have now decided to add another letter to the many on the subject of the preservation of our shooting rights and privileges.

I think that perhaps those among us (excluding "T.-B.") who write, write too much and do too little. Those who do not write, do nothing. This may sound a little fierce. Perhaps if I say that I am guilty also the blow will be softened. The story of the episode will show how.

One afternoon I was in the gunroom of a certain sports store in Chichester where I had gone to have a recently purchased 10-bore tightened and the dents in its barrels removed. The customer in front of me was a ruddy-faced countryman who was buying cartridges. He had asked for Alphamax "fours" and I thought of duck. My "Getting ready for some duck shooting?" started the conversation and our wildfowler soon made it obvious that he was expecting to start next Saturday, August 13.

I was suffering from my usual mental aberration and it did not occur to me immediately that he would be breaking the law by 19 days. However, the gunsmith quickly pointed out the error and on the reply, "What's that, then, a local ruling?" explained that it was all to do with this new Wild Birds Protection Act. The fowler still was not convinced, but the gunsmith was doing very well. He explained that the Act affected the whole of the country, not just Chichester, and if anybody was not sure of the details they should get in touch with the local wildfowlers' association. (The Pagham and West Sussex W.A.).

I chimed in then with the secretary's address and explained that the Association had the shooting rights over Pagham Harbour, but that its main ideal was to be the voice and brain of local wildfowlers in preserving their shooting privileges.

This local fowler went off with a box of heavy-load cartridges and a very perplexed look. That is the story, and the moral: I let him go that way. He did not write down the secretary's address, and I am sure that he could not have remembered it. If that man does not write to Mr. Eric Phillips and does not become a member of the Association then it is my fault. I am sure now he had never heard of the Wild Birds Protection Act; yet he was obviously a keen fowler to be buying cartridges so that he could start shooting on what he believed was the first day of the season.

He probably lived on, or very close to, one of the creeks in the Chichester area. He certainly has local knowledge which would make his friendship to a greenhorn such as myself, and his membership to the Association invaluable.

Yet I let him get out of that shop with his perplexed look and only a very hazy idea as to what "all this Wild Birds Act is about." He will likely start shooting on the 13th, and if he is summoned I shall be guilty, not him. For that I should be kicked from here (Billingshurst) to Pagham and back.

What I should have done was to keep him in conversation, perhaps take him for a drink—anything to ascertain quickly his character, and if he was a fit member for our Association. If he was, to propose his membership right away. That is what every member should do with all his shooting friends and acquaintances.

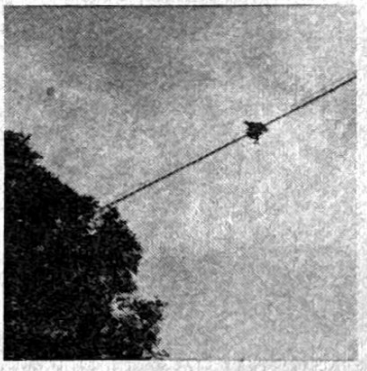
A sense of apathy is human nature, but that does not make it excusable. If we want members and supporters we *must* go out and get them. It is criminal to sit back thinking that if we have joined then we have done our part. New members will not come to us, but from now on I, for one, am going to them.

Malcolm Laker,
Billingshurst, Sussex.

A photograph taken on August 12, showing Sir Alfred Aykroyd's party making their way to the butts for the second drive on Hawksworth Moor, Yorkshire, part of Ilkley Moor. The number of grouse seen, as forecast, was disappointing.

ACCIDENTAL DEATH

Sir,—The enclosed snapshot may interest readers. The unlucky partridge met its end on the wires many weeks before this picture was taken—



Well and truly hung.

as far as I know it may still be there.

I should imagine that it is a little too well hung by now, to be considered fit even for the table!

David Anne,
London, S.W.10.

A TEST FOR SHOOTERS

Sir,—Having read Mr. Leslie James's letter under the above heading, there are a few things I would like to tell him. I want to tell him about Jim A., Billingsgate fish porter and wildfowler, a safe and first-class shot who can name the majority of the birds of the countryside on sight, and can call quite a few with just his mouth and hands. He is 100 per cent Cockney who, when he is not at the fish market, can be found walking the quieter part of the Thames with gun and dog.

There are many others I could

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name who, on their days off, are 50 to a 100 miles from the town and on their favourite shooting grounds; be they beside the Blackwater, or Medway. You could not teach these townsmen anything, Mr. James.

Have you ever heard of The London and Home Counties Wildfowlers' Association? I have the honour of being a member of this Associtation. Pay us a visit at our next meeting and in skill, ballistics, or field lore and behaviour these despised "townies" may surprise you.

One other point, I spent seven years teaching the rudiments of infantry weapons, rifles, machine guns, mortars, etc., and the theory, stripping, stoppages, and *safe handling* of these weapons was taught in a lecture room, and no man ever got near the range until he had grasped these fundamentals. You never take a section of infantry down to a range with loaded weapons until these lessons have been mastered.

Some of these men were from the town, and their skill with weapons and field craft in the jungles of Burma were second to none.

PAT TAYLOR,
Barking, Essex.

Sir,—I cannot accept in silence your editorial reproof on my views on a theoretical "test for shooters."

I believe that we "old stagers" should give *every possible assistance to youngsters with a country background* who are keen to shoot, and I am still doing this in a very practical fashion. But, I think we should step warily before we encourage the older man (who usually has the means) to wander round with a gun, and especially so if we live near where he is likely to operate! I think it is a mistake to make any sport *too* easy, and the difficulties facing the townsman who wants to shoot will help him to enjoy it more when he is successful—as he will be if he deserves it.

I am cynical enough to think that "sport through strength of numbers" will help the gun trade and your circulation — two very laudable objects, but a really experienced pigeon shooter could kill more pigeon than a whole classroom of certificated beginners, and well you know it, Sir!

The town-dweller needs some education in country lore as fires, litter, and sheep-worrying by dogs so aptly underline, but we should step warily before we *encourage* him to roam round with a lethal weapon.

LESLIE R. JAMES,
Peaslake, Guildford.

[Although we have remained silent regarding our own views on a test for shooters, we repeat that there are any number of sound, highly-principled, would-be pigeon shooters living in towns who might, with good advantage, receive a useful grounding in sporting etiquette and country lore at the hands of competent lecturers, before going out to shoot. They could learn a lot in this way, particularly regarding Safety-First measures. Careless shooting, bad manners, and even worse shooting "crimes," to say nothing of sheep-worrying, are by no means confined to those who live in towns.—Ed.]

Members of Sir Alfred Aykroyd's party examining the bag after the first drive.

Enquiry in my area will confirm that I have done as much as any man and more than most to encourage the newcomer to shooting. I have helped at least 50 would-be shooters by introducing them to land-owners (finding many of them private shoots), by lending them guns and equipment, by providing free transport, and by assistance in obtaining Firearms Certificates, etc. I often have three guns out, lent free and *for a time* my own shoot was at the disposal of anyone who wanted a rabbit or two. At your request I have found squirrel shooting for several of your readers. I cannot see that this is "smug indifference or discouragement."

Bitter experience has shown me that there must be a good background of country knowledge and a respect for shooting discipline before a new shooter is acceptable, and I cannot see how these qualities can be acquired at a few lectures—in the field, yes. After several fiascos (to use a polite word), I have stopped sending town shooters to farm friends plagued by pigeon; unless I know them very well.

A LUCKY ESCAPE

Sir,—Your correspondent F. J. Burt, whose letter under the above heading appeared in your issue for July 29, appears to believe that, because he thought that he had separated his 12-bore from his 20-bore cartridges, he is entitled to consider himself a careful shot.

Surely to take a look down the barrel in which he remembered placing a cartridge, to make sure that it was clear before reloading, was only elementary common sense.

E. K. HOLE,
Nutley, Sussex.

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

WE hear and read a great deal about "the pick of the litter." One of the most difficult things in the world, in my opinion, is to pick out the best puppy in a litter at the usual weaning age—about eight weeks. It is difficult enough for the expert to pick out the most promising puppy for show purposes at this age, and it is infinitely harder to be certain of choosing the best potential worker. Indeed, for either purpose, the only really safe thing to do is to defer choice until the pups are aged about six months or even more—and then there is still plenty of margin for error.

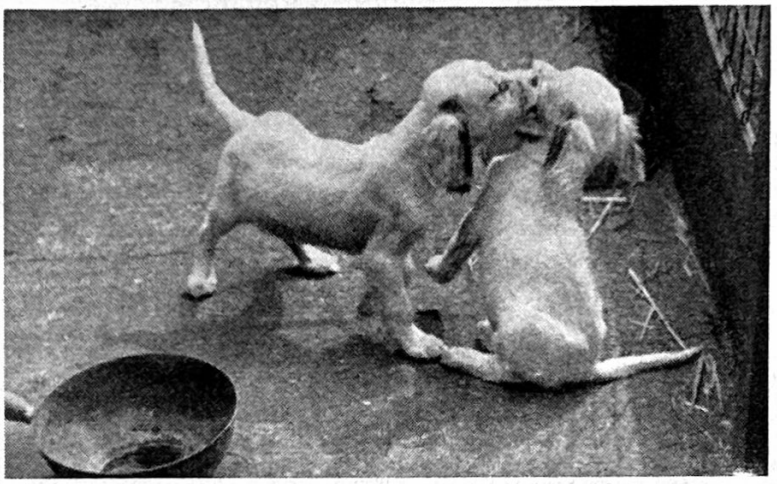
We are only concerned here with working prospects, and whilst there are certain general principles which can be laid down to guide the purchaser of a gundog puppy there is no infallible process. As I wrote in my book, "Gundogs; Training and Field Trials": "Generally speaking, the best bet is the bold puppy, which comes up to you fearlessly, does not back away when you extend your hand to him, or roll on his back. Try clapping your hands loudly, to watch the reaction, and refuse any puppy which shows signs of fear and retires into the kennel. If you can see the puppies all out together, running about in a field or under cover, you will get a better idea of the bold specimens and those which will face long grass, and willingly retrieve a small dummy or knotted handkerchief. . . ."

Whilst I still stand by those words, generally speaking, I cannot help remembering the many pups which turned out very well despite the fact that they in no way complied with my own demands! Elsewhere in the same book I mentioned that I had had great success by simply choosing the smallest and most unlikely puppy from a litter—a thing which I have done many times and without a single case for regret. Remember that the highly-strung and sensitive puppy often makes the best and cleverest mature worker, albeit more trouble to train, and that a lot can happen between—say—eight weeks and training age (six to eight months), to make or mar a puppy. The shy, retiring specimen may, with careful handling and general experience, become bold and fearless whilst, in converse, the bold puppy can be made shy and sensitive by thoughtless handling, or by some accident or untoward incident.

Advantage of Extra Attention

One of the reasons why the smallest of a litter may become the best bet for work is, I believe, the extra attention that it receives from many breeders. The "little runt" is regarded with sympathy and affection, and it often happens that the breeder, in his attempts to get it to pick up in condition and size, will give it special food and attention, and handle it more. Little wonder that such a puppy tends to become bolder and more intelligent than its larger brothers and sisters. Indeed, under special treatment the runt often becomes downright "cocky," and makes up in cheek and audacity what it lacks in size and shape. It has to, in order to survive, and if given the aforementioned special attention, it usually turns out, if not the best, at least above average in intelligence and confidence.

In a recent article, I mentioned a little labrador puppy which I thought I was going to lose. It lost condition and weight, and for a time refused all solids, due I believe, to DDT poisoning. Special care and attention, an extra couple of "swigs at the milk bottle" (the dam) each day, and within less than three weeks this puppy was the liveliest, boldest and most confident puppy of the litter, although it remained much smaller than its companions. No doubt the fact that I had cause to handle it, on its own, much more than the others, plus its natural will to survive, made all the difference. At all events, it became the outstanding puppy in the litter, and my obvious choice for work. Time will decide whether or not I have been right.



The "cad" of the litter often becomes confident and even "bossy" with special attention and handling.

The Gift of Conceit

There is an old saying that "conceit is God's gift to little men," and this seems to apply almost equally to puppies as to humans! Nearly all the tiny workers I have owned and trained have been outstanding in the field, compared with the larger litter brothers and sisters. Of course, many of the "runts" make up in size after a while, and though few of them ever grow quite as big as normal, they do not remain midgets. Small dogs always seem to me to be faster and (very often) more stylish than big ones, and I care not what breed of gundog they may be—I have a weakness for the little 'uns. Providing that there is no definite physical weakness or disability, you need have no qualms about picking the smallest puppy of the litter.

A reader from Southampton writes to ask if it would be possible to train an English pointer for general purposes—rough shooting, retrieving, land and water, and for questing bushes and rough cover. He tells me that he has endeavoured to get a first cross spaniel-pointer without success, and as he needs a short-coated dog and one which could accompany a bicycle without too much effort, the pointer naturally springs to his mind. He tells me that he has considered the German short-haired pointer, but is reluctant to forsake the English breeds, and that in his opinion, labradors are apt to become lethargic after the first few years of their working lives.

Pointers as All-Round Gundogs

Pointers have, of course, been trained as all-round gundogs, and I have tried my hand on one or two with varying degrees of success. One bitch became an excellent all-rounder, and was, fortunately, a natural retriever from the start. She used to suffer damage to her tail in cover, but apart from this was excellent in the thickest brambles, and was not too difficult to get to range close. Many pointers—one might almost say most—are not natural retrievers, and this should be taught from a very early age. Puppies of almost any breed can be taught to carry if played with when tiny, and to defer retrieving practice may make it very difficult to achieve without forcing the pupil.

There is a belief held by many dual-purpose pointer folk—the German specialists in particular—that to pay too much attention to retrieving the dummy in the early stages is a mistake. They say that the accent should be on ranging and pointing until this is perfected, and retrieving can come later. However, the German pointer-retriever breeds have a stronger *natural* pointing instinct than have the English and American pointers and setters and so I believe that if retrieving is to be taught without resort to the "force method," it must be taught and encouraged very early.

I should not recommend a pointer as an all-round dog for a man who is inexperienced with dogs, or for one whose time for training is limited or who is short of patience. Apart from the retrieving question, pointers may not take kindly to close ranging, which will be required for rough cover work, nor do many of them like rough cover. As regards water, this is a very moot point. You might be lucky and get a pointer with a natural water-loving instinct, or you might get one which had an antipathy for the element.

One thing is quite certain, however, and that is to choose a puppy from a working strain (smaller than most show pointers, faster, more stylish and with a much greater aptitude for work and "trainability"). It should be obtained early—eight to ten weeks if possible—and practised at retrieving from the very start, using a small dummy and gradually increasing the size of the carry, and also using different objects for carrying. For general purposes, as opposed to orthodox pointer work—obedience training should commence early and the puppy made quite obedient and steady before being taken into the field for more advanced work.

Mr. A. H. Verschoyle is one of my most regular and interesting correspondents upon gundog topics, and he now writes from Ireland giving his views on pointer and setter trials in that country. As there seems to be an increasing interest taken in bird-dog work over here, I feel that his remarks and suggestions will be of interest to many readers, and it is interesting to note that in his country greater attention seems to be paid to making the trials more nearly like a shooting day than is the case

over here. Mr. Verschoyle writes as follows:

"A remark by you in regard to pointer and setter trials as to their improvement in recent years encourages me to look back, as I have taken a part in field trials since 1932, both as an entrant and (since 1935) president of the Irish Field Trial Association. My views in regard to trials are, of course, chiefly as to those held in this country. In 1934 after a day's shooting over dogs, three of us started an argument about trials and how they could be improved. Two of us held the view that at trials held for pointers and setters, to make it more like the real shooting day, birds should be shot at all such trials. Finally, one man said 'If you will put up one pound each for printing, I will try and run such a trial.'

"This was agreed to, and the question of ground came up. I was not certain that my own ground had game distributed enough to make a satisfactory venue. However, I agreed to lend it and we held our first unofficial trial. That was the start of the Irish Field Trial Association. We saw a lot of things in the rules of field trials which we did not like, and gradually we changed those rules, always with the one idea that our rules would give the genuine shooting dog a fair chance.

"We did not like the draw being all fixed up beforehand, and we made a rule that the draw should be on the ground, and take place before each round. We did not like programmes given to the judges, as though it would be impossible for some dogs not to be known, we thought that a judge might subconsciously be influenced by knowing previous winners. We disliked the backing rule by which a dog which did not back was led up behind the pointing dog and forced to stand. We considered that this was not backing, and we inserted the following rule (No. 5 in our rules), 'As soon as a dog has obtained his point, the handler of such dog shall stand back three clear yards and shall not move up to flush until instructed by one of the judges to do so—the handler of the other dog remaining stationary. When a dog is on point the handler of the other dog (should his dog not have already observed and acknowledged such point of his own accord) shall draw his dog's attention by hand, whistle or both and should his dog still fail to observe and acknowledge such point, he shall be considered to have failed.'

Blank Cartridge Trials

"Again, in the previous rule (rule 4), 'Judges are requested not to award a prize to any dog that does not back of his own accord.' Another thing we wanted changed and made rule 7 to cover this. We saw dogs that would not move up pulled up by hand so rule 7 said, 'Any dog that will not move up freely to flush in front of his handler, or who is lifted by hand will be at once disqualified.'

"Another thing which we thought unfair was to penalise a bye dog by drawing him against some animal that had been put out. We changed this so that a bye dog should be drawn against a dog still left in the stake, and we fixed that no dog should be drawn more than once in that meeting against a bye dog. These rules, 12 in number, have been adopted *en bloc* by most, if not all, the field trial clubs in this country, though some of them still retain the blank cartridge trial.

"It is my considered view (and I know many shooting men agree with me) pointer and setter field trials in this country have much improved, both in the work of the dogs and the running of the trials themselves. I am vain enough to give a very large portion of the credit for this to the policy of The Irish Field Trial Association in having game actually shot over the dogs at all their meetings. Trained dogs get disgusted very soon if you miss birds too often in a normal day's shooting, and I am convinced that a trained dog does not give his best at a blank cartridge trial, which is thus not as near the real thing as it should be."

Field Trials

The Scottish Field Trials Association held pointer and setter trials on grouse at Yester, Gifford, East Lothian, on August 1 and 2, the judges being Mr. John Forbes and Miss I. MacIntosh. Eleven dogs competed in the all-aged stake, six in the puppy and non-winners' stake, and two brace in the brace stake.

Awards. A.A. Stake: 1, Mr. J. A. Rank's pointer Scotney Dale (W. C. Brunt); 2, Mrs. F. Nagle's and Miss Clark's Irish setter Sulhampstead Bey d'Or (G. Abbott); 3, Capt. W. Parlour's English setter F.T.Ch. Sharnberry Whitestone (Miss E. Knight). Reserve, Mr. J. A. Rank's pointer Scotney Phillip (W. C. Brunt). Two certificates of merit were awarded. Brace Stake: Mr. W. Humphrey's brace, English setters Dashing Duke Bondhu and Dashing Diana Bondhu; 2, Mrs. F. Nagle's and Miss Clark's brace, Irish setters Sulhampstead Basil d'Or and Sulhampstead Bey d'Or (G. Abbott). Puppy and non-winners' Stake: 1, Mrs. Nagle's and Miss Clark's Irish setter Sulhampstead Belle d'Or (G. Abbott); 2, Capt. W. Parlour's English setter Sharnberry Marksman (Miss Knight). Reserve, Mr. W. Humphrey's English setter Dashing Diana Bondhu.

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The Irish Field Trial Association will hold pointer and setter trials at Mount Taafee, Lough Talt, Ballina, Co. Mayo, on August 25 and 26, when the judges will be Messrs. R. E. Poynton and C. Holland. Schedules can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. R. E. Poynton, Heronford Cottage, Shankhill, Co. Dublin (telephone, Bray 3145).

* * *

South Eastern Gundog Society. Another interesting training class was held on August 7, at Bures Manor, Leigh, by kind permission of Major Charrington, some 60 members attending with 40 or more dogs. Mr. G. Williams took the advanced dogs, and set some difficult retrieves for them. Mr. H. L. Curtis, with the aid of Mr. W. E. Hickmott and Mr. G. S. Smith, instructed the other members and these dogs were set shorter retrieves on varying types of ground. After tea, many members took the opportunity of putting their dogs into water, whilst others practised 400 yard retrieves and distance-control.

The next training class will be held on Sunday, August 28, at Betchworth Village Hall, at 3 p.m.

* * *

The German Shorthaired Pointer Club are holding autumn trials, confined to members, on Saturday, October 1, at Hailes Castle, East Linton, East Lothian, Scotland, where the judge will be Mr. G. Melville Christie, the well-known pointer trialler and exhibitor. Schedules can be obtained from Mr. W. K. Simpson, 31 Nevern Place, London, S.W.5., telephone Frobisher 3243.

* * *

Mrs. E. H. Bailey, of the Yorkshire Gundog Club, has written asking me to rectify an ommission made in the report of the Club's trials held recently. The marked card I received had no first prize indicated in the Gordon Stake, and it therefore appeared that a first prize had been witheld. Far from being the case, the stake was won by Mr. G. Burgess's Gordon Rowney of Crafriant, a dog which worked extremely efficiently and was well worthy of the first prize.

Coypu Marsh

(Continued from page 540)

The idea was good, but a suitable place was not so easy to find. Eventually, however, after two or three abortive efforts with a scythe, only to find no water except a slight dampness round the rush-roots, a "dole" was found. A dole is a low in a marsh where water is mostly permanent. This dole was grown over with common rush, and had about three inches of water under it. When it was scythed and the rush-roots chromed out, it made a bright pool about half the size of a tennis lawn. I threw in some dross barley and hoped for tremendous things. There is an art in feeding-in duck, and it can only be learnt by experience. But barley should be thrown into the wind, so that the grain spreads evenly over the surface, and not put in little heaps round the edges, as I have seen done.

It was October time when I made this little pool, the golden time on the marshes, when the reeds are as yellow as ripe corn and the far away upland trees burn with autumn fire—the tranquil, sad, and lovely time of the dying year. It is also the time of the big teal migrations. Three nights after the first spreading of barley a friend and I shot thirteen teal on that little pond. And shooting carefully about once a fortnight we shot fifty head of fowl by the end of the season.

The following season I enlarged the pond to full tennis lawn size, which is quite big enough. One night of wind and moonlight we got twenty-one mallard. They came in like bullets and if we had stayed on we could have shot fifty, but we had enough. Another night we shot fifteen. The second season the score was a hundred and sixty-two—all mallard and teal except for two wigeon. It is close shooting, but not easy at the fowl skim in over the reeds, for they are hard to see on a dull evening.

Shooting alone, I have often had ten or a dozen mallard and teal. The secret is to feed little and often, not over-shoot, and to leave before it is quite dark, so that fowl are still coming in and the lead is not broken. In other words, do not be greedy; shoot what you want and then come away.

Wanted: More Salmon

(Continued from page 544)

planted in 1953 and as, owing to impassable weirs, no salmon has been able to reach the Tone's spawning grounds for many years, any young fish must come from this stocking. A trap was specially constructed and 33 smolts were caught in it, marked and released during the following year. Now another 12,000 salman and 51,000 sea-trout ova have been planted to carry on the good work, while the navigation channel has been altered to form a fish pass so that returning fish can reach the spawning grounds unaided.

Altogether, the theory of stocking with ova seems already to be backed with quite a lot of encouraging evidence, and it may well be an important factor in the development of salmon fisheries. Probably a number of other River Boards are working on the same lines as the Somerset R.B. though I have no details about this, and fater the four years or so of a salmon's youth and sea life we shall see the results. After all, however efficiently salmon launch their progeny into the world, in these civilised days they may well expect the Welfare State to do its share!

* * *

Since receiving the above article, the following news item appeared in *The Star*.

"Hopes of bringing salmon fishing to Essex have been strengthened by the initial successes of an experiment being carried out by the Essex River Board. Earlier this year the Board placed salmon eggs in the River Stour. Now Mr. Hugh Fish, the Board's Pollution and Fisheries inspector, says that 50 per cent of the eggs have hatched. Next stage in the experiment will be to mark the young salmon with the Board's special mark. So that their migratory movements can be checked the fish will either have fins clipped or their gills stamped. They should make their way down river to the sea and later return to spawn in the place where they were hatched. If they make this two-way journey the Board may construct special by-passes to enable the fish to negotiate weirs and other obstructions more easily."

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

Aug. 27: Southern Counties Skeet Championship, Blandford and Dist. G.C., Dorset.
Aug. 27: The London G.C. Members' Shoot.
Aug. 27: Leicester and Dist. G.C. Open Shoot.
Aug. 27: Wetherby and Dist. G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot.
Aug. 28: Surrey & Hampshire Skeet Championship, Grange Gun Club, Tongham, Surrey.
Aug. 28: Coventry & District Dog & Gun Club, Binley. Members' Shoot, 10.30 a.m.
Sept. 3: North Wales Skeet Championship, North Wales Gun Club, Rhosesmor.
Sept. 4: Coventry & District Dog & Gun Club, Binley. Practice Shoot, 10.30 a.m.
Sept. 4: Yorkshire and Club Sporting Championships, Harrogate G.C., Yorks.
Sept. 7: Birmingham G.C. Practice night, members only.
Sept. 10: Open 50-Bird D.T.L. Shoot, combined with the Shropshire D.T.L. Championship at Billingsley; Billingsley & Chorley G.C.
Sept. 11: Coventry & District Dog & Gun Club, Binley. Members' Shoot, 10.30 a.m.

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Reports and Results

Blandford and District Gun Club. A very successful entry of 51 guns took part in the Dorset Sporting Championship at Hedge End under ideal conditions and with the traps behaving well, thanks to the hard work of the two field captains, Cliff Thorne and Walt Mussell and the team of trappers under Les Elford. The Championship, The Conyers Cup, was won by R. R. Browning of Wantage, and he must be congratulated on his score and of putting it across the Browning's of Blandford on their own ground. Four Colts took part in the shoot, over 50 per cent of the course, this number grows each year and it is hoped that in future years other competitors will bring their offspring along to swell this entry. The course consisted of rabbits, walk-up, driven partridges, high pheasants, grouse, and springing teal, a total of 100 birds which did not appear to be difficult, but the scores told a different tale.

Final results were: The Dorset County Championship, R. R. Browning (Wantage) 93 kills. Class A: 1, J. Baigent (Hants) 90; 2/3, A. E. Browning (Dorset) and L. Boyland (Bournemouth) 89; 4, D. Purcell (U.S.A.) 88. Class B, President's Cup: 1, N. Dance (Wilts) 89; 2, J. Wiseman; 3, N. Brock (Devon); and 4/7, F. Readhead, W. Mussell, R. Kinch, and T. Dennett. The Colts was a tie between Peter Boyland and Malcolm McFarland both 25 kills and in the absence of one of them this will be decided at the Skeet meeting to be held later this month. The I.C.I. Tankard for a Novice was won by P. Caldecot Smith of Dorset.

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On August 6, at West Pinchbeck, and under ideal conditions, some very good shooting was seen by the many who entered for the Championships. No less than five skeet 20 were shot, and 4 19x20. Mr. Max Freeman did a very good 40 straight to win the Lincs Open and Residential Skeet Championship, with Mr. D. B. Hare (Essex) and Mr. E. L. Nichols (Pinchbeck) close by with 39 each; after shoot-off Mr. Hare 2, Mr. Nichols 3.

In one squad of five only seven clays got by out of 100. I do not know if this is a record or close to it. We were very pleased to welcome several new guns including two U.S.A. sportsmen, one being Sgt. G. Vicas from East Kirkby who made his first skeet 20 on an English layout and the first to be made on West Pinchbeck Gun Club who had not already done so before this. We hope he receives in due course, and Mr. Max Freeman who made the first 40 straight on the same layout also Mr. Nichols and Mr. Hare skeet 20s all are to be congratulated on the performance.

In the Lincolnshire Sporting Championship there was again some very fine shooting, the winner being Mr. E. L. Nichols with a score of 48x50 to take the Chappell Trophy and the I.C.I. Shield and Medal. Second was Mr. D. B. Hare with 46x50; 3rd Mr. G. Freeman 44x50. We were sorry that several guns arrived too late to shoot the full programme. Pools were won by Mr. Blacklock, G. Vicas (U.S.A.), and R. E. Couch. The prizes were kindly presented by Mrs. R. E. Couch of Pinchbeck.

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The Billingsley and Chorley Gun Club staged a successful Open Down-the-Line shoot on August 6 and combined with it the West Midland Down-the-Line Championship. An entry of 30 included a number of international shots, and we were very pleased to welcome them to our club, and also some other enthusiasts who had come long distances to shoot with us. We were glad to see them and hope they will come again. In spite of a strong wind and a certain amount of teething trouble with a newly-installed automatic trap, some very good scores were made, the winner of the Open Cup and Class A being Mr. Glyn Jones of Rhosesmor, closely followed by T. E. Sanders of Liverpool. One of our local shots, M. Wootton, of Wolverhampton, did very well to tie for third place with the English international Mr. E. Fear.

Full results were as follows (all scores being in points out of a possible 200).—Open Cup and Class A: 1, G. Jones, Rhosesmor, 184; 2, T. E. Sanders, Liverpool, 180; 3, E. Fear Sheffield, tied with M. Wootton, Wolverhampton, each 174. Class B: 1, E. W. Ward, Bridgnorth, 166; 2, R. Sheen, Nantwich, tied with G. E. Woodford, Aylesbury, each 157. Class C: 1, N. F. Cooper, Stourbridge, 136; 2, J. Pryke, Bridgnorth, 134. West Midland Champion was M. Wootton, Wolverhampton, 174.

We hope our many visitors will come again on September 10 to try conclusions with the air currents which on our ground can make the birds very tricky on occasion. We shall by then have two automatic traps installed, and look forward to some keen shooting for the three cups which are up for competition.

Wildfowling Clubs

(Continued from page 541)

ful whist drive and dance was held in Andreas Parish Hall. Members have met here on the first Monday in each month to discuss matters of interest and exchange views; these meetings could be better attended as it is usually the same members who turn up each month. Mr. Foulkes Roberts of Lamb Hill, Bride, gave a lantern show to members on Manx birds which proved most instructive and interesting. Adverts were placed in an effort to obtain new blood for partridge and grouse stock, also to obtain French partridge and more hares, but proved unsuccessful.

A number of hares were released on the hills; being given by Lieut.-Col. Riggall to whom our thanks are due. Our president made a present of 250 pheasant eggs in April and these were hatched out under hens; but due to the cold weather and difficulties of finding hens that would sit, results were not as good as expected. The society purchased six sittings of jungle fowl eggs at considerable cost, and these hatched out very well, and have proved hardy and easier to rear than pheasants and have created a lot of interest.

Approximately 100 pheasants were released in July, August and September and ten imported birds, two cocks and eight hens in April, also the birds which had been kept in the breeding pens during the winter after a few sitting of eggs had been taken were also released. Good reports are to hand regarding pheasants nesting in the wild state and the birds released last summer have wintered well in spite of the severe weather. To our knowledge three cock pheasants have been killed this spring, two having been shot, one only just 11 days ago; this is a serious matter, but it is difficult to get proof to take Court action and the public in general are asked to help in preserving pheasants whenever possible.

The burning of gorse and heath after March 16 is becoming more prevalent; the Government should stop this practice.

Vermin drives were organised and well patronised. One hundred and forty head of vermin were definitely accounted for by members, besides more which were not brought in; 20 wild ferrets were destroyed. The society views with concern the increase in the numbers of pole-cats and ferrets in the countrside. A hare skin and stoat pelt are still required for Manx Museum.

The report of the hon. treasurer (Mr. Wm. Jones) showed that the year started with a credit of £65 5s. and finished with a credit of £41 5s. 10d.

Mr. C. P. Yates was re-elected president, Mr. Chrystal was re-elected chairman, Mr. Corteen and Mr. Wylde were re-elected joint hon. secretaries, Police Constable Jones was re-elected hon. treasurer. When the election of the committee was about to be made Dr. Paton said that in view of the proposed changes in game legislation it was essential that the same committee be kept in existence. Dr. Paton was persuaded to allow his name to go forward for re-election and the committee was re-appointed *en bloc* with the exception of Mr. D. V. R. Crichton who had expressed a wish to retire. Mr. Percy Corlett was elected from four candidates to fill this vacancy. The other members of the committee re-elected are: Dr. Paton, Messrs. T. E. Corlett, R. C. Corrin, W. C. Jones, H. Garrett, S. Lindsay, and A. M. Crellin-Anderson. Mr. R. F. Hughes was re-elected hon. auditor and Mr. F. Turnbill Press correspondent.

Grouse Prospects Fair in the North

Following are some of the bags made on the moors on the Twelfth and succeeding days.

There were very few parties out on the moors in Aberdeenshire. Birds are very scarce, chiefly because of the long, dry spell.

One of the few parties out was that of Sir Malcolm Barclay-Harvey of Dinnet. The party, comprising five guns, had a bag of fourteen brace for the day.

Fifteen and a half brace of grouse were shot on the Balnamoon moors, Angus, on the 12th (five guns) and 25½ brace on August 13th (five guns).

Parties out on the Highland moors reported reasonably good bags. In glorious weather they found in most cases that young birds were very healthy.

Bags obtained on the 12th in Badenoch included: Pitmain (Kingussie), five guns, 36½ brace; Chapel Park (near Kingussie), three guns, 12½ brace; Glenfeshie, 12½ brace; Glen Banchor, 24½ brace; Phoenes, 29 brace. Five guns were out over Corse Estate, Lumphanau, and were pleasantly surprised to find their bag totalled 38½ brace. The party consisted of Dr. M. G. Gibb, Mr. W. G. Thow, Mr. Harry Sleigh, Dr. T. Allison and Mr. T. Davidson.

Although grouse were scare on most upper and lower Speyside estates, birds were generally in an excellent condition. Major R. L. O. Waddington and a party of eight Americans who went out from Blairfindy Lodge found that there was a very good proportion of young birds to old. Ninety per cent of the birds were too young to shoot, but on the whole the condition of the birds was the best seen since 1950. The good quality of the birds was also commented upon by Major G. S. L. Whitelaw, Knockando House, who accompanied by two others, had ten brace. Major Whitelaw found the grouse were free from disease, but lacking in numbers. His companions were Col. K. Mackessack, Ardgye, and Col. M. L. Wroughton, Woolley Park, Berkshire.

At Inchrory Lodge, Tomintoul, Col. Oliver Haig and party (eight guns) bagged thirty-three brace. Again the accent was more on quality than quantity.

Col. Haigh's party included Col. J. Congreve, 7th Hussars; General Sir Douglas Baird and Major George de Pree.

There was no shooting at Dallas Estate (Brig. H. W. Houldsworth) or at Easter Elchies (Capt. W. F. Player), but there may be later in the season.

It was an inglorious Twelfth for most of the Perthshire shoots. The start of the season was marked in many cases by a "walk-over"—merely to comply with tradition.

Glenlyon House: Mr. D. J. Molteno and Dr. Riddell, 36 brace. Birds in good condition.

Remony: Major A. D. Millar, Major J. C. Monteith and Mr. A. R. McCosh, 20 brace, 15 hares. Birds patchy, coveys small.

Bolfracks: Mr. Douglas Hutchison and Col. Adderly, 8½ brace. Short walk. Prospects better than last year.

Pitcastle: Mr. J. A. Kyd and party. 5 guns, 30½ brace. Prospects moderate.

Lochs: Col. Wills and party. Short day. Quota bag of 10.

Moness: Two guns. Short day. 10 brace.

Pitcarmick: Sir George Nairn and party went for a short day and bagged 35 brace.

Baledmund: Mr. J. L. Finlay Fergusson with Mr. Robin Barbour, Mr. Peter Carmichael, Brigadier Howman and Mr. Hamish, Liddell, five guns, 23 brace.

Balnakeilly: Short day. Major Stewart Wilson, Lord Mansfield and Colonel Penn, three guns, 14 brace.

Balyoukan: Mr. R. S. Walker and party, which included Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Vlasto, Mr. A. C. Davies, Mr. W. V. Gursteen, Mr. D. H. Sharp, Mr. R. C. Thomson and Mr. R. W. R. Kennedy, eight guns, 50½ brace. A good showing of birds.

Cluniemore: Major David H. Butter and Lord Lansdowne, Major Lyle and Captain Bethel, four guns, 25 brace.

Tarvie: Colonel F. J. D. Colman. Out for an hour, had 4 brace. Good coveys observed.

Pearsie: Major G. Sherriff. Over Ascreavie, Kingoldrum shooting tenant of Pearsie, Glenprosen, which belongs to the Earl of Granville, had 35½ brace.

Glenqueich: Mr. I. B. Walker, of Craigeassie, with eight guns had 40 brace. The birds were in good condition, but not as plentiful as last year and were lying very close.

Rottal Lodge, Clova: Mr. W. J. Lowndes, of Chester Square, London. Two guns had 8½ brace in four hours walking. The birds were in good condition, but lying very close.

Balfour: Mr. William Black, five guns, 26 brace, birds scarce.

Hunthill (Hon. David E. Hely-Hutchison), eight guns out walking, 52 brace.

The Hon. David E. Hely-Hutchison reported that considering the shortage of stock left, after last year's disease, the grouse had done very well. There were a number of good forward coveys and a high percentage of young grouse. He thought next year would see the moor back to normal.

Dalhousie Estates tenants have not arrived.

Fern Moor: The Earl of Inchcape out from Auchnacree House, five guns, 51½ brace.

Westlaws and Bandirran: Sir Denys Lowson and party of four had 29 brace of grouse.

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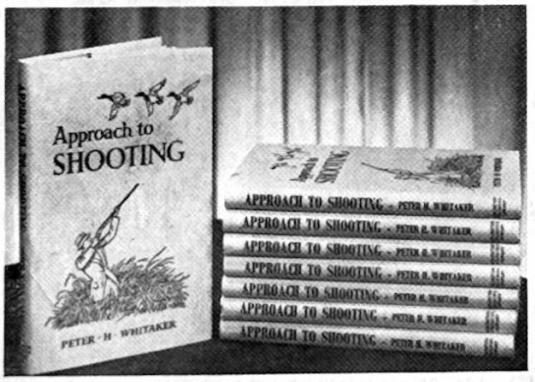

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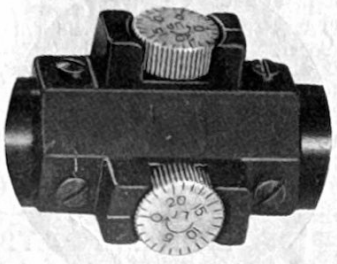

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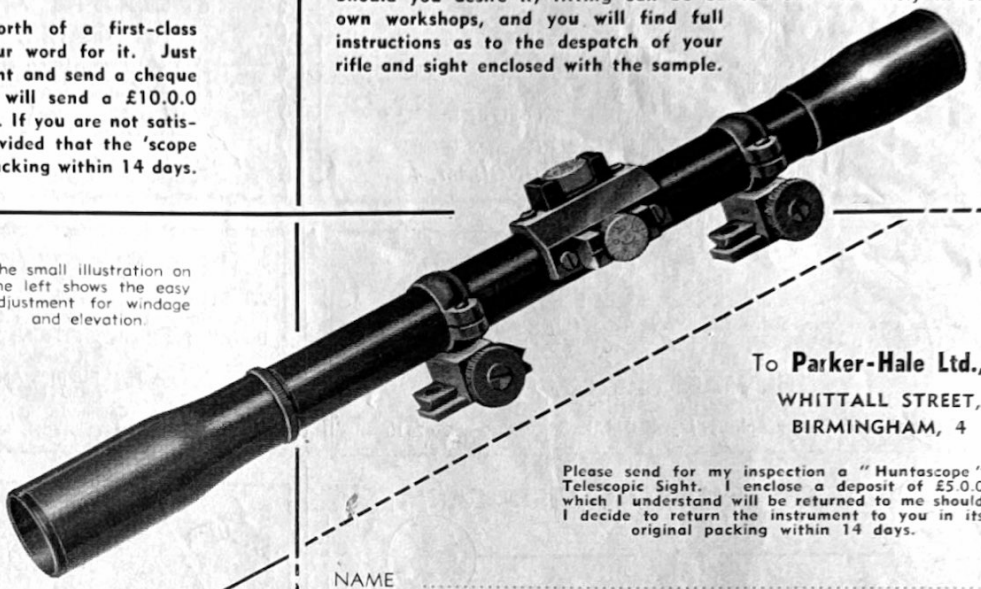

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